

Adult Attachment Interview

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OVERVIEW

The Adult Attachment Interview is a structured, semi-clinical interview focusing upon early attachment experiences and their effects. Subjects are asked for five adjectives to describe their relationship to each parent during childhood, and then for memories which support the choice of each adjective. They are asked whether they felt closer to one parent, and why; whether they had ever felt rejected during childhood; whether parents had been threatening with them in any way; why parents may have behaved as they did during childhood; and how these experiences may have affected the development of their personality. In addition, they are asked about any major loss experiences. The technique has been described as one of "surprising the unconscious" (George et al, 1985), and a quick review of the interview format shows that it provides ample opportunities for a speaker to contradict, or else simply fail to support, earlier or succeeding statements. The hour-long interview is transcribed verbatim, and judges work exclusively from the discourse record.

The Adult Attachment Interview has several distinctive features:

1. It includes characteristics of both the highly structured or questionnaire format and the more informal clinical interview. In keeping with aspects of the questionnaire format, questions are asked in a set order, accompanied by structured follow-up probes. At the same time, as in clinical interviews, the participant is at times encouraged to expand upon and clarify the description and evaluation of his or her experience. Moreover, interviewers must skillfully ascertain that the timing of their queries, and the nature of their own discourse serves only to highlight, and not to alter, the participant's natural volition to respond in particular ways.
2. The protocol is deliberately arranged to highlight structural variations in the presentation of life-history. As noted above, for example, participants are asked *both* (i) to provide a set of five adjectives describing the relationship with each parent during childhood, and (ii) to illustrate each adjective with a specific biographical episode. In the analysis of the interview, responses to these two sets of queries are considered jointly. When explicit

autobiographical memories contradict the generalized overview provided, the participant is considered to exhibit a particular kind of incoherence of presentation (inconsistency).

3. Unlike interview or questionnaire formats which restrict focus to the content of individual responses, then, the analysis of the Adult Attachment Interview relies in good part upon *comparisons* of content of *across* responses. Additionally, it rests upon the study of exact linguistic form. Few participants will have previously been addressed with the insistent series of questions which comprise this interview, and the words, phrases, speech errors, and hesitations found in the participant's immediate response are central to the analysis.

4. This given, the interview is transcribed verbatim, and in direct contrast to transcription techniques which correct for errors in discourse in the interests of clarifying essential content, all errors and hesitations are meticulously recorded (see Main, 1994). Only the verbatim transcript is employed in the analysis of the interview, and no reference is made to nonverbal or pragmatic features of the participant's response.

Analysis of the Adult Attachment Interview. A system of interview analysis developed by Main and Goldwyn (1985-1996), is applied to each transcript, and the process of analysis proceeds in three stages. In the first (i) and second (ii) stages the judge uses a set of 9-point rating scales in an attempt to ascertain (i) the speaker's probable childhood experience with each parent (e.g., *father involving/ preoccupying, mother loving*), and (ii) his or her current state of mind with respect to these experiences as revealed in discourse usages (e.g., *overall coherence of transcript, vague discourse, or lapses in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse during the attempted discussion of traumatic events*). Once scores are assigned to the interview text--some based upon study of the transcript as a whole (e.g., *overall coherence of transcript*), and others focusing upon just a few sentences (e.g., *lapses in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse*)--the text is considered again (iii) in the light of a classification system which attempts to represent the speaker's current state of mind with respect to attachment (Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985; Main & Goldwyn, 1985-1994; see also Main, 1995).

The interview classification system directs judges to consider speakers secure with respect to their attachment histories if they appear to be *valuing of attachment, yet apparently*

objective in discussing any particular relationship or experience, and insecure if they appear either *dismissing of*, or *preoccupied by* early attachment relationships and experiences (Main & Goldwyn, 1984; Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985). The attempt to classify mental states rests as well upon an analysis of discourse usage, chiefly but not entirely represented in scores assigned to the speaker on the several state-of-mind scales (above). This aspect of interview analysis is based in part upon the speaker's ability to produce a coherent narrative in the re-telling of life-history, to collaborate actively with the interviewer in the telling of the story, and to engage in "metacognitive monitoring" of his or her presentation, as when the speaker actively alters or corrects statements just previously made. In addition, the analysis of the interview is understood in terms of the concept of cooperative discourse as presented in the work of the linguistic philosopher Grice (1975, 1989). Grice suggested that rational discourse is most likely to be achieved when speakers adhere to a Cooperative principle, which normally¹ requires adherence to four specific conversational maxims :

Quality-- "be truthful, and have evidence for what you say". This maxim is violated when, for example, the speaker's father is repeatedly described in positive to highly positive general terms, but specific biographical episodes actively contradict these positive descriptors.

Quantity-- "be succinct, and yet complete". This maxim is violated when, for example, the speaker bluntly responds "I don't remember" to several queries, thus refusing a complete response, or in contrast responds at excessive length, speaking well beyond the appropriate conversational turn.

Relation-- "be relevant to the topic as presented". This maxim is violated when, for example, queries regarding the childhood relationship with the speaker's mother is met instead with discussions of current interactions with the mother, or with descriptions of the speaker's relationship with his or her own children.

1. Violations of these maxims are permitted when "licensed" by the speaker, as see Grice (1989) and Mura (1983). An excessively long speech turn can, for example, be licensed if the speaker begins with, "Well, I'm afraid this is going to be quite a long story", while a very short turn can be licensed by "I'm really sorry, but I don't feel able to discuss this right now".

Manner-- "be clear and orderly". This maxim is violated when, for example, speech becomes grammatically entangled, psychological "jargon" is used, vague terms appear repeatedly, or the speaker fails to complete sentences which have been fully started.

Interview analysis is in large part understood in terms of adherence to vs. violation of the above maxims, and several scoring systems point to violation of particular maxims-e.g., *vague discourse* (violating manner), *repeated insistence on lack of memory* (violating quantity), and *unsupported positive portrayal of parent/idealization* (violating quality). What the system attempts to classify, then, is not the speaker's early experiences, but rather *the mental state respecting those experiences elicited by the interview queries*. In sum, an individual's state of mind with respect to attachment is revealed in his or her ability to describe, discuss and evaluate attachment experiences while simultaneously maintaining coherent, cooperative discourse (Hesse, 1996).

If the protocol and guidelines presented here are followed closely, violations of coherence, consistency, and cooperation in the discussion of attachment-related experiences will normally rest upon the participant's response alone. If the interviewer fails to follow the protocol, the discourse characteristics on which interview analysis rests may arise from interviewer errors rather than the participant's own spontaneous usages. In this case, the interview must be discarded.

Tasks for the interviewer. Given the aims of the interview, its potentially stressful nature, and the system of analysis utilized, the interviewer has three primary objectives:

First, as is obvious, the interviewer must adhere closely to the interview guidelines, asking each question with its succeeding probes. This necessitates full memorization of the protocol. As well, the interviewer must have practiced and personally reviewed a number of his or her own pilot protocols.

Second, the interviewer must (a) allow the participant to express any existing tendencies to violations of the principles of coherence and collaboration, while (b) remaining personally well-structured and collaborative enough to ensure that any such violations are due solely to the

participant's own volition as expressed in discourse. This requires some art. A speaker with a tendency to violate quantity and relevance must be allowed to reveal this tendency, yet must also be offered occasional reminders of the topic. Interruptions tactlessly forcing the speaker to return to the topic may force the speaker to cease the expression of these discourse tendencies, while failure to occasionally remind the speaker of the topic will eventually "license" the speaker to continue to digress.

Finally, in view of the fact that memories or feelings related to attachment may engender distress, whether or not it is overtly expressed, the interviewer must be sympathetic, while remaining professional and matter-of-fact. The interviewer must also be prepared to alter or terminate the interview for highly distressed participants, must be prepared to suggest or obtain immediate or follow-up assistance, and must be well-trained in matters concerning confidentiality and other aspects of the protection of human subjects.

THE ADULT ATTACHMENT INTERVIEW SCORING AND CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS: PROPERTIES AND FINDINGS

As noted above, the analysis of the Adult Attachment Interview rests on repeated study of the verbatim transcript. Three of the five categories of interview response--*secure-autonomous* (*coherent-collaborative*), *dismissing* and *preoccupied*--identify fairly consistent response patternings found across the course of the interview. These are sometimes termed the "organized" forms of interview response. Both theoretically and empirically equivalent to the three "organized" pattenings of infant Strange Situation response (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978)--*secure*, *avoidant*, and *ambivalent/resistant*-- until recently these have been the adult attachment classifications most widely utilized. In addition, however, brief lapses in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse occurring during the attempted discussion of traumatic events now lead to placement in a fourth, *unresolved-disorganized* adult attachment category, equivalent to Main and Solomon's (1990) disorganized-disoriented infant attachment category. Finally, the adult attachment classification system has recently been expanded to include a fifth, *cannot classify* category (Hesse, 1996). Transcripts assigned to either the unresolved/disorganized or the cannot classify category are always assigned to an alternative, best-fitting "organized" category as well.

The states of mind identified by the interview correspond closely to categories of infant response to separation from and reunion with the parent observed in Ainsworth's Strange Situation (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978, see Table 1). The adult attachment categories were in fact first generated through study of a development sample of 44 interview transcripts taken from Bay Area parents observed with their infants in Ainsworth's Strange Situation five years previously. This development sample yeilded the three "organized" adult

Table 1 about here

attachment categories noted above, each corresponding to one of the original "organized" forms of infant Strange Situation response (Main, 1995). Specifically, the mothers and fathers of six-

year-olds who had been *secure* with them in the Strange Situation were identified as being *valuing of attachment, yet seemingly objective in describing any particular relationship or experience*, the mothers and fathers of children who had been insecure-avoidant were identified as being *dismissing of attachment*, and the mothers and fathers of children who had been insecure-ambivalent/resistant were described as *preoccupied by past attachment relationships and experiences*.

Following generation of the rule system, this development sample was discarded, and the system was then successfully applied to a remaining 66 parent transcripts by a coder blind to infant Strange Situation behavior (Main & Goldwyn, 1984; Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985; see Main, 1993/1995 for overview). Later, Main and Hesse (1990) reported that the parents of disorganized/disoriented infants in the Bay Area sample exhibited brief lapses in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse during the attempted discussion of traumatic events, and individuals exhibiting such lapses were thereafter assigned to a fourth, *unresolved/disorganized* adult attachment category. The still relatively new *cannot classify* category has been used in a number of studies of clinical samples, but with one exception (below) has not been applied to studies in which the infant's Strange Situation response is known.

Overview of the Adult Attachment Categories

A speaker's state of mind with respect to attachment is classified as *secure-autonomous* (coherent-collaborative) when--whether life-history appears favorable or unfavorable--the speaker shows indications of valuing attachment relationships and experiences; the presentation and evaluation of experiences is internally consistent; and responses are clear, relevant and reasonably succinct (see Table 1). Placement in this category is associated with high scores for *overall coherence of transcript*, and *overall coherence of mind*. A secure-autonomous response is found in the majority of adults in low-risk samples (Van Ijzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996), and adolescents judged secure are liked and respected by their peers (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). In parents, the secure-autonomous classification predicts a secure infant Strange Situation response pattern (see Table 1).

A speaker's state of mind is classified as *dismissing* when Grice's maxim of quality is violated in that positive terms used to describe parents ("excellent mother, very normal relationship") are unsupported or actively contradicted ("I didn't tell her I broke my arm: she would have been really angry"). Such speakers often also violate quantity, in part by insisting on lack of memory. Placement in this category is therefore associated with high scores for *inconsistent favorable portrayal of parents (idealization of parents)* and often on *insistence upon lack of memory for childhood* as well. This interview response is linked to infant avoidance.

Transcripts are judged *preoccupied/entangled* when the speaker exhibits a confused, angry, or passive preoccupation with attachment figures and--although not infrequently pleasant in affect-- is strikingly non-collaborative in discourse. Violations of manner include use of psychological jargon ("She has a lot of material around that issue"); nonsense words ("She was dadadada so much"); and childlike speech ("So I, I hid from the grownups at dinner"). Speakers are also identified as preoccupied through violations of relevance (as when queries about early relationships are met with descriptions of recent interactions) and quantity (as seen in speaking far beyond their conversational turn). Placement in this category is associated with high scores on *angrily preoccupied speech* or on *vague discourse usages*. Parents judged preoccupied typically have ambivalent/resistant infants.

Interviews are considered *unresolved-disorganized* on the basis of high scores for *lapses in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse* occurring specifically during discussions of potentially traumatic events. Lapses of this kind may represent interference from normally dissociated memory systems (as when a dead person is briefly discussed as though alive), or unusual absorptions involving traumatic memories (as when the speaker falls silent, or shifts to use of eulogistic speech). Main and Hesse have proposed that these lapses may result from momentary interference with working memory and/or serial processing experienced during the attempted discussion of overwhelmingly frightening experiences, and may in fact represent micro-dissociative episodes² (Hesse & Main, 1996; Main & Hesse, 1992; see also Main &

2. Note that drawing upon Hilgard's work respecting multiple controls on thought and action (Hilgard, 1977-1986), Bowlby had pointed to the presence of a dissociative component in disordered responses to loss experiences as early as 1980 (Bowlby, 1980). The identification of such processes through brief lapses in discourse or reasoning was, however, not anticipated.

Morgan, 1996). Individuals may be assigned to this category on the basis of lapses lasting no more than two or three sentences, and may be coherent, collaborative speakers during the remainder of the interview. Unresolved/disorganized attachment status in parents is associated with disorganized/disoriented infant Strange Situation behavior.

Finally, a few individuals (termed *cannot classify*) are observed to be without a well-defined discourse strategy, as indicated most frequently by an alternation between the inherently incompatible preoccupied and dismissing states of mind. Individuals are assigned to this category when, for example, high scores are obtained for both *idealization of*, and *angry preoccupation with*, the mother. Currently, only 7% to 10% of transcripts taken from individuals in low-risk samples are judged unclassifiable (Hesse, 1996; see also Minde & Hesse, in press). An initial report from a small Rome sample indicates that mothers placed in the cannot classify category have infants who are disorganized/disoriented (Ammaniti & Speranza, 1994)³.

The Adult Attachment Interview: Psychometric Properties and Empirical Studies

Psychometric properties

Establishing an individual difference measure requires a series of tests of its "psychometric" properties in order to ascertain, for example, that individuals respond similarly when assessed two or more times in similar circumstances, and that differences in response are not simply attributable to individual differences in the effort to appear socially desirable. These tests have been particularly necessary to the study of adult attachment. Since, for example, the primary quality distinguishing adults to be placed in the secure-autonomous attachment category is the ability to describe, discuss and evaluate attachment experiences coherently, it has been critical to establish that adults placed in this category are not simply distinguished for general

3. It seems possible that a number of the offspring of cannot classify parents will be unclassifiable in terms of Ainsworth's traditional (secure, avoidant, ambivalent-resistant) attachment categories. Main and Weston (1981) had noted that a number of infants in low-risk samples were unclassifiable in these terms while, working with high-risk samples, Crittenden (1985, 1995) and others had noted unclassifiable alternations between avoidant and ambivalent-resistant Strange Situation behavior patterns (see Main & Solomon, 1990). Even following the development of a fourth, disorganized-disoriented infant attachment category, Main & Solomon (1990) have therefore suggested that a fifth, "unclassifiable" infant Strange Situation attachment be retained.

intelligence (Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 1993). Similarly, since individuals are placed in the dismissing category in part on the basis of high scores on *repeated insistence on an inability to remember childhood relationships and events*, it has been important to establish that dismissing individuals remember impersonal and factual childhood events as accurately as others (Sagi et al, 1994). Finally, it has been critical to ascertain whether the differing patterns of discourse which appear when an individual is queried regarding attachment-related childhood experiences simply reflect a habitual manner of speaking (Waters et al, in press).

Psychometric studies of the Adult Attachment Interview conducted in several countries indicate that the secure-autonomous, dismissing, and preoccupied interview categories are:

- stable across 1 to 15 month periods, with stability within the dismissing, secure-autonomous and preoccupied categories ranging from 77% to 90% (Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 1993; Benoit & Parker, 1994; Sagi et al, 1994);
- unrelated to most measures of intelligence (Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 1993; Rosenstein & Horowitz, 1993; Sagi et al, 1994; Steele & Steele, 1994; Ward, Botyanski, Plunket, & Carlson, 1991; Waters et al, in press, provides an exception);
- unrelated to both long-term and short-term memory (Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 1993; Sagi et al, 1994);
- unrelated to social desirability (Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 1993; Crowell et al, 1993);
- not attributable to interviewer effects (Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 1993; Sagi et al, 1994);
- and not attributable to a more general discourse style. Thus, using a format and coding system similar to that employed in the Adult Attachment Interview but focusing upon work history as opposed to attachment history, it has been demonstrated that a speaker's "work interview" classification is independent of his or her adult attachment classification, so that the same speaker can be e.g., dismissing or preoccupied during the discussion of early attachment relationships and experience,

but coherent and collaborative (secure-autonomous) in the discussion of work history (Waters et al, in press).

Prediction of infant Strange Situation behavior towards a given parent from that parent's response to the Adult Attachment Interview

Recently, Van IJzendoorn (1995) undertook a meta-analysis of 18 samples in which infant Strange Situation response to a particular parent was compared to the classification assigned to that parent on the basis of the Adult Attachment Interview (854 dyads). When the two insecure adult and infant attachment categories were collapsed to obtain a two-way classification, the correspondence between parental and infant attachment classifications was 75% ($k = .49$)⁴. The combined effect size was 1.06 (equal to a Fisher's Z of 0.51), $r = .47$ (biserial $r = .59$, Cohen, 1988). The relation between parental attachment and children's attachment was therefore very strong, and in fact a procedure devised by Rosenthal (1991) indicated that it would take 1,087 studies with null results to diminish the combined p level ($Z = 13.29$, $p = 5.87E-30$, one-tailed) to insignificance (Van IJzendoorn, 1995). Correspondence for the three-way cross-tabulation was 70% ($k = .46$), and studies in which the interview was administered prior to the birth of the first child (Benoit & Parker, 1994; Fonagy, Steele & Steele, 1991; Radojevic, 1992; Steele, Steele & Fonagy, in press; Ward & Carlson, 1995) showed 69% correspondence for the three-way classifications ($k = .44$, $N = 389$). This predictive relation between a parent's response to the Adult Attachment Interview and the infant's behavioral response to the parent in the Ainsworth Strange Situation was found not only in low-risk samples, but also in three out of four high-risk, poverty samples (Ward & Carlson, 1995; Ward et al, 1991; Zeanah et al, 1995; in a high-risk sample studied by Kolar, Vondra, Friday & Valley, 1993, however, no relation was found). Remarkably, given the brevity of both the lapses marking unresolved adult attachment status and the bouts of disorganized/disoriented behavior marking infant disorganized attachment status, the unresolved adult category predicted the

4. Investigators continue to report interview-to- Strange-Situation matches equivalent to those summarized by Van IJzendoorn (1995), and an 84% secure-insecure adult to infant match was recently obtained in a study of 44 Canadian mothers and infants (Pederson, Gleason, Moran & Bento, 1996).

disorganized/disoriented infant category significantly, even with interviews conducted prior to the birth of the first child (combined $d = 0.65$, $r = .31$)⁵.

Recent studies have linked the parent's attachment status to the child's attachment at older ages or in differing ways. Utilizing a Q-sort system devised by Waters and his colleagues (Waters, Vaughn, Posada & Kondo-Ikemura, 1995), for example, secure vs. insecure responses in the parent's interview predict security vs. insecurity in the young child's behavior observed in the home (Das-Eiden, Teti & Corns, in press; Posada et al, 1993). Using Main and Cassidy's (1988) attachment classification system for older children, George and Solomon (in press) have demonstrated that the four major Adult Attachment Interview categories predict the corresponding attachment categories in six-year-olds.

The Adult Attachment Interview as predictive of parental caregiving

It is necessarily the case that parental behavior, however subtle, mediates the relation between a parent's state of mind with respect to his or her own attachment history (adult attachment status) and the infant's Strange Situation behavior toward that parent. This given, there is as expected a marked relation between a parent's Adult Attachment Interview response and his or her observed 'sensitivity' to infant signals and communications, and Van IJzendoorn's recent (1995) meta-analysis of existing studies in fact yielded a combined effect size of $d = .72$.

Parental attachment status is not as strongly related to sensitivity to infant signals and communications as it is to infant Strange Situation response, suggesting the presence of a "transmission gap" (Van IJzendoorn, 1995) with respect to our current ability to identify the behavioral mechanisms mediating the relation between parental and infant attachment classifications. One profitable direction for future study would involve a more fine-grained (micro-analytic) analysis of infant-parent interactions in relation to the parent's Adult Attachment Status, such as that undertaken by Haft and Slade (1989). Another would involve more extended observations of infant-mother interactions, such as those originally undertaken by Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al, 1978). This latter point is of special import since several of the

5. Effect size was strongly associated with the amount of training the investigators had had in the disorganized-disoriented system of Strange Situation analysis, with the study conducted by Ainsworth and Eichberg yielding a remarkable overall effect ($d = 2.31$, $r = .76$).

studies included in the meta-analysis focused on children beyond infancy and did not employ Ainsworth's original measure.

Adult attachment status in clinical and violent populations

A meta-analysis of clinical vs non-clinical populations conducted by Van IJzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg (1994; see also Van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996) has indicated that insecurity in adult attachment representations is strongly associated with clinical status ($d = 1.03$, $N = 688$), even when interview transcripts are completely blinded to clinical status and persons suffering from thought disorder and major affective disorder are excluded from the clinical sample (as see e.g., Allen, Hauser, & Borman-Spurrell, in press). Suicidal ideation in adolescents has been found strongly associated with the unresolved-disorganized attachment category (Adam, Sheldon-Kellar & West, 1996), as have anxiety disorders (Manassis, Bradley, Goldberg, Hood & Swinson, 1994). Borderline diagnosis has twice been found associated with a rare, fearfully preoccupied adult attachment sub-category (Patrick et al, 1994; Fonagy et al, 1996).

Mothers of sleep-disordered children (Benoit, Zeanah, Boucher & Minde, 1992), children diagnosed with failure to thrive (Benoit, Zeanah & Barton, 1989), children diagnosed with disruptive behavior disorders (DeKlyen, in press) and mothers of many other children brought to clinics are found insecure in their response to the Adult Attachment Interview (Crowell & Feldman, 1988; replicated for a new sample by Crowell et al, 1991). However, 4 out of 10 mothers of children suffering from ADHD *without* accompanying disruptive behavior disorders were judged secure (Crowell et al, 1991).

Violence is also associated with insecure attachment. Virtually all maritally violent men are insecure with respect to their own attachment histories (Holtzworth-Monroe, Hutchinson & Stuart, 1992). Security is almost entirely absent among psychiatrically distressed offenders imprisoned for violent crimes (Van IJzendoorn et al, in press), as it is among German right-wing activist youth (Hopf, 1993). Stalker and Davies (1995) found that victims of sexual abuse were insecure, with unresolved/disorganized attachment status predominating. An unusually high proportion of interviews in such samples are unclassifiable (Hesse, 1996).

Longitudinal studies: Predicting response to the Adult Attachment Interview from early infant-mother observations

Recently, several investigators have attempted to link infant Strange Situation response to the mother to Adult Attachment Interview responses observed in the same individuals 16 to 20 years later. In one study, the AAI classifications of 17-year-olds from 30 nontraditional California families were compared with early Strange Situation classifications to the mother as determined at one year of age (Hamilton, 1995). This investigation revealed that 77% of adolescents secure vs. insecure in infant Strange Situation assessments exhibited corresponding (secure vs. insecure) mental states in the Adult Attachment Interview. In another study, Waters and his colleagues administered the Adult Attachment Interview to fifty 21-year-olds from middle-class Minnesota families (Waters, Merrick, Albersheim & Treboux, 1995). Interview responses were compared to Strange Situation behavior with the mother 20 years previously, and the secure vs. insecure adult attachment classifications of 78% of young adults were found predictable from infancy after individuals suffering highly negative life events were removed from the sample (72% match for the full sample)⁶.

These findings had been partially anticipated in a study of 77 Canadian mothers and their adult daughters in which a 75% match was obtained across the secure, dismissing, and preoccupied categories (Benoit & Parker, 1994), and in a similar study of parents and their psychiatrically hospitalized adolescent children conducted by Rosenstein and Horowitz (in press). Relatedly, Beckwith and her colleagues (Beckwith, Cohen & Hamilton, 1995) had compared observations of mother's responsiveness to crying in the home setting during infancy to Adult Attachment Interviews in adolescence, finding dismissing attachment status associated with consistent maternal unresponsiveness.

6. Utilizing a Q-sort system of AAI analysis (Kobak, 1993) rather than the system of interview analysis described earlier (Main & Goldwyn, 1985-1996), Adult Attachment Interview responses in German 16-year-olds were compared to Strange Situation responses to mother 15 years previously (Zimmermann, Fremmer-Bombik, Spangler & Grossmann, 1995). Although no direct relation to infant attachment status was found, adolescent AAI responses were related to mothers' own attachment representations as assessed in earlier Adult Attachment Interviews. As in the Minnesota study, negative life events appeared to affect current responses.

The above results should *not* be interpreted as providing evidence for simple stability or continuity of reaction pattern since, for example, coherent, collaborative (secure) discourse has no direct resemblance to the corresponding (secure) infant Strange Situation response pattern of exhibiting distress on maternal leavetaking, then returning to exploration upon reunion (Main, 1995, in press). What has been uncovered is the *predictability of discourse usage in life-history narratives as it evolves out of early interaction patterns*. Note as well that negative life events contribute to incoherent-noncollaborative discourse in adolescents secure in infancy, and that there is sufficient unpredictability to refute any claim to early determinism.

New Directions

Although initial reports tended to emphasize categorical aspects of AAI interview analysis, as noted earlier several 9-point scoring systems are now available for representing both the speaker's childhood experiences with each parent and the speaker's current state of mind with respect to attachment. Future studies will be likely to include these dimensional scoring systems, and several such studies have been completed (as see Allen et al, in press; Cowan et al, 1996; Fonagy et al, 1996). Additionally, some investigators may wish to focus upon one particular scale in itself, as for example comparing scores for *vague discourse usages, lapses in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse, or metacognitive monitoring* at the onset and the conclusion to a course of therapy.

Fonagy and his colleagues have proposed a new scoring system for the Adult Attachment Interview which assesses the speaker's tendency to acknowledge the existence of intentionality and mental states in others, and a re-analysis of the London sample has indicated that speakers high in "reflective self" capacity have securely-attached infants (Fonagy et al, 1991; see also Main, 1991). Similarly, in conjunction with a study of suicidal adolescents, Adam has argued that not only loss and abuse experiences, but also extreme separation experiences should be considered potentially traumatic, and hence that interview passages concerning such experiences should be examined for lapses in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse (Adam, Sheldon-Kellar & West, 1995, in press). Both a (two category) fine-grained coding system (Grossmann, Fremmer-Bombik, Rudolph, & Grossmann, 1988), and a three-category Q-sort analysis (Kobak, 1993) have been developed as alternatives to the four-category system of AAI analysis.

Fremmer-Bombik's system has been found strongly related to infant attachment status and related as well to maternal sensitivity (Grossmann et al, 1988), while Kobak's system relates to clinical status and to psychophysiology (e.g., Cole-Detke & Kobak, in press; Dozier & Kobak, 1992; Dozier, Cue & Barnett, 1994). In contrast to Fremmer-Bombik's coding system and Kobak's Q-sort system, each of which is interview-based, none of the existing attachment self-report inventories appear to be consistently related to attachment status as assessed in the AAI (see e.g., Crowell et al, 1993; DeHass, Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van IJzendoorn, 1994; Hamilton, 1995; Holtzworth-Monroe et al, 1992).

Byng-Hall (1995) has suggested combining studies of attachment with studies of dyadic and family interaction (see also Marvin & Stewart, 1990), and some investigations of this kind have already been conducted (Cohn, Cowan, Cowan & Pearson, 1992; Cowan, Cohn, Cowan & Pearson, 1996; Pianta, Morog & Marvin, 1995). In a study conducted in the Israeli kibbutzim, Sagi and his colleagues have found that for communally (as opposed to home) sleeping infants, the mother's attachment status did not predict the Strange Situation behavior of the infant (Sagi et al, in press; this study demonstrates ecological limits to the intergenerational "transmission" of attachment patterns). Treatment outcome studies utilizing the Adult Attachment Interview (i.e., studies of adult attachment status prior to and succeeding the course of therapy) are underway (as see Fonagy et al, in press), as are studies comparing treatment to the attachment status of the therapist (Dozier et al, 1994). Further studies of adult attachment status as related to clinical status have been completed (see Jones, Main & Del Carmen, 1996), and suggestions for other uses of the interview are available (Main, 1995, 1996, in preparation).

SCIENTIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

The Adult Attachment Interview should be the first procedure which is administered on a particular day, and must not follow upon other interviews or tasks involving the description and evaluation of stressful life events. Even when interviews regarding family relationships, abuse or loss experiences precede the interview by several days, the researcher risks detracting from the ability of the interview to “surprise the unconscious” when the same topic is brought forward again in the Adult Attachment Interview. Where loss or abuse experiences have been too recently discussed, the participant may, for example, be less likely to experience a slip in reasoning or discourse in response to what is now the second or third discussion of these topics. In this case, the ability of the interview to identify participants who fall in the unresolved-disorganized category will be jeopardized.

Some but by no means all assistants skilled in other aspects of research produce acceptable Adult Attachment Interviews, and researchers are advised to review the work of prospective interviewers before employing them in this particular undertaking. Since coders cannot analyze poorly conducted interviews, the researcher should take great care in reviewing these initial protocols.

Researchers should oversee the transcription of the interview, as well as its analysis. Directions for transcription are not included here, but can be obtained separately (Main, 1994). Since the analysis of the interview depends upon an exacting study of its discourse properties, the transcription must include all errors in speaking, as well as (timed) pauses and hesitation markers. Ideally, the interviewer should check each transcription as it emerges for accuracy. At times, the interviewer may be able to add in contextual information necessary to interpretation of interview responses. As a simple example, the participant may have interrupted the flow of her speech with a seeming lapse in monitoring or violation of manner-- “My first separation from my parents was quite difficult. I hope it doesn’t get me!”-- while the interviewer may remember that a wasp had intruded on the office at this point in time.

Wherever possible, when research focuses upon a population with a specific history (as, individuals who have been hospitalized, or individuals who have children experiencing specific difficulties), researchers should "blind" the transcript to the individual's special status.

Removing information without simultaneously deleting other information critical to coding is a delicate task best carried out by persons familiar with the interview scoring and classification systems. It is time-consuming, but the data yielded are far more valuable. The researcher using a control group can develop a scheme for "removing" (appearing to have removed) similar "information" from the control interviews, or else for inserting identical "information" into all interviews. Before concluding that the information is successfully removed (or disguised) the researcher should run a check on the sample, asking assistance from individuals who do not need to be "blind" in determining whether clues to the individual's special status remain.

Coders aware that the population is special can be enjoined to inform the researcher if they believe they are able to "guess" the nature of the target population, and should also be asked to point to any specific interview which seems to include information regarding the speaker's history or special status. Once the coding is completed, coders can be asked what they believed the study was about, and where a control population has been included, they can be asked to indicate those individuals believed to be members of the "target" population.

Researchers wishing to add new questions should place them at the end of the existing interview. Researchers not infrequently have special interests which may fit with the theme of the Adult Attachment Interview. New questions cannot, of course, be added to the interstices of the existing interview, or the researcher will not be able to compare his or her results to those of other researchers. *New questions must then be added only following question 20.*

Queries regarding the perceived relationship between the parents, or sibling relations fit well to the theme of the interview and can be added. Researchers should remember, however, that the participant will be tired by the end of the interview, and that questions 18-20 are intended to move away from the more difficult memories and feelings which may have been aroused. New queries regarding any potentially traumatic experiences should obviously not be added.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Researchers are responsible for selecting interviewers who will use good judgment in the conduct of the interview, and who are capable of taking reasonable action to alleviate any distress which may arise during the discussion of untoward experiences. In written project descriptions which are given to subjects prior to administration, prospective participants are usually informed that they may find parts of the interview stressful or saddening, and that they are free not to answer any question at any time. Because of its potentially stressful nature, the Adult Attachment Interview must be conducted in person rather than by phone.

Researchers should forward a copy of this manuscript to their Human Subjects committees, and should also think through ethical considerations pertaining to their own particular use of the interview. Human subjects considerations include preservation of the confidentiality of the information to be gathered from the research participant, and preservation of the confidentiality of any analyses of the interview which are conducted. Except in unusual circumstances, only the researchers will have access to information directly identifying the participant.

As is obvious, the Adult Attachment Interview should not be used with clinical or patient populations, or with populations who are at risk (for example, maltreating parents) except and unless it is used by a clinically trained individual working in a context which provides facilities for therapeutic follow-up. Vulnerable populations such as medical patients, psychiatric patients and prisoners also require particularly careful consideration, both with respect to ascertaining their willingness to participate in the interview and with respect to use and/or analysis of the interview by persons having influence over their wellbeing.

Following the Adult Attachment Interview, some activity should be provided to lighten the atmosphere for the participant. For example, a brief interview on another, non-stressful topic can be added, as can a non-stressful task. Following question 20 the interviewer lets the participant know that she or he (or the researcher) will be available in the future, should any questions relating to the interview arise.

Most persons will not have previously been asked either to review their life experiences in such detail, or to connect them to their present feelings, behavior and personality. The practiced and sympathetic interviewer who has a matter-of-fact and professional manner can make the experience of the interview not only profitable but also enjoyable for many participants.

PREPARATION FOR CONDUCTING THE ADULT ATTACHMENT INTERVIEW

Preparing to conduct the Adult Attachment Interview is expected to take about two weeks. Prospective interviewers study these guidelines for over-riding principles, then memorize all queries and probes. After being interviewed themselves, they work with at least three practice subjects, and then 3 to 10 "real" subjects who are pilots for the research project. Three of these interviews are transcribed by the prospective interviewer. Each recording and transcript is checked first by the interviewer, and then again together with the researcher. These steps are described in turn below.

Memorizing the Interview

A natural conversational style and a professional yet empathic demeanor must be maintained throughout the interview, and this is not possible unless the interviewer has fully memorized the interview, and has practiced it extensively. The interviewer must, in other words, be sufficiently sure of the queries and probes to give full attention to the participant, and to be ready to gracefully respond to any topics which arise out of order. Once all questions and probes are memorized, occasional glances to the "prompt" sheet (the one-page summary sheet included here to assist in ensuring that all queries and probes are fully covered) will be only minimally disruptive.

Practice as "Participant" and with Peers

Learning begins with an initial practice session in which the prospective interviewer is interviewed, often by a friend or acquaintance. This person need not have any previous knowledge of the Adult Attachment Interview, and indeed may simply read the questions from the present guidelines. The prospective interviewer should respond naturally to each question, and with as much honesty as privacy allows. Being interviewed can reveal the sense of struggle in accessing memories, in selecting words, and in dealing with accompanying feelings which no amount of observation of this process in the role of interviewer can provide.

The prospective interviewer then practices with several willing friends, peers, or indeed strangers who will play the role of the research participant. In the interests of preserving privacy (particularly for persons the interviewer sees regularly), the interviewer may want to instruct subjects to role play. It may be useful if some play the part of participants particularly likely to present difficulties for new interviewers (e.g., by talking too much about irrelevant topics, falling silent, or repeatedly insisting that they are unable to remember). These practice-participants should be prepared to provide critiques regarding their experience of the interview. Once interviewer and researcher agree that the interviewer is ready to work with "real" participants, the prospective interviewer continues until several (pilot) interviews in sequence appear satisfactory.

Critiques of Audio-recording and Transcript by Interviewer and Researcher

The interviewer should critique his or her own audio-tapes and transcripts, determining whether probes were missed, extraneous comments were added, or responses were cut short. As well, this critique should be based on a consideration of common errors and biases as described within this manuscript, and upon the full protocol provided here.

The interviewer's self-critique will assist with the joint critique provided as the tape and transcript are reviewed again with the primary researcher. In some cases, videotaping interviewer and participant will provide a good basis for critique. However, the researcher should remember that the actual analysis of the interview will focus upon the data obtained through audio recording alone.

It is imperative for both interviewer and researcher to check through the first 6 to 10 interviews conducted. Once interviewing technique is well established, a proportion of interviews must still be checked regularly by both interviewer and researcher.

Transcription of the Practice and Pilot Interviews

The practice and pilot interviews must be transcribed, because errors are readily missed when only the audio recording is utilized. *Interviewers should themselves transcribe three interviews*, including at least one of the practice interviews, and the first two of their project "pilot" interviews (above). In transcribing, the interviewer should follow the transcription directions provided by Main (1994), and then check through the audiotape for accuracy.

Familiarity with the Classification and Rating systems for the Adult Attachment Interview

Unless it is in the interests of a particular research project that the interviewer is kept blind to the system of analysis used with the Adult Attachment Interview, the interviewer should have some familiarity with both the classification systems and the rating systems which will be applied to the interviews once transcribed. The purpose of gaining familiarity with the systems of analysis is that of familiarizing the interviewer with the range and content of responses which will be needed and expected for study. The interviewer need not be prepared to rate or classify the interview, and indeed while the interview is being conducted, a mind free of evaluation regarding the participant's likely attachment status is ideal.

Setting for Conducting the Interview

Interviews should be conducted in well furnished, private settings (usually, offices made especially comfortable for these purposes). The participant's chair should be comfortable, and it is important that the subject has both a way to rest, and a way to shift positions with ease. It is usually a good idea to have participant and interviewer at an angle to one another, rather than face to face, so that turning to face the interviewer is elective, but facing slightly away is also natural given the position of the chairs. Some subjects seem to enjoy being near a table or desk which they can lean on. Many researchers provide coffee and/or other refreshments, and tissues should always be available.

The interview is audio-taped in its entirety, and depending upon their estimate of the degree to which it may interfere with the participant's comfort, some researchers will elect to video-tape it as well. Interviewers write down the five adjectives the participant provides for the relationship to each parent so that these adjectives may be probed in the proper sequence. There is otherwise no need for the interviewer to take notes.

The interview should *not* be conducted in the participant's home. In the home, not only are interruptions likely, but the participant will not have the same sense of privacy, and of access to a professional context.

The Adult Attachment Interview usually takes just over an hour, depending upon the complexity and number of issues to be discussed. To avoid embarrassing participants who have

little (or a great deal) to say, the interviewer lets them know at the outset that they should expect the interview to take anywhere between 45 minutes and an hour and a half. Of course, given the complexity and difficulty of some life histories, and the tendency of some participants to run well beyond their conversational turn, a few interviews will run to two hours. If interviews with a low-risk population are consistently running well under or well over an hour, however, they should be checked to make sure the interviewer is following the protocol. Following the current directions for transcription, which include use of wide margins and line-numbering (Main, 1994), the average interview transcript in a low-risk population runs between 20 and 33 pages (single-spaced).

The interviewer must not leave these instructions and/or the interview prompt sheet in view of the participant. The prompt sheet can be kept casually on the interviewer's lap, and the interviewer may occasionally look casually forward to the next question. In this way, the natural flow of the interview can be maintained, and the interviewer will not seem disinterested through being at a loss for words. Because the interview has been memorized, only the briefest glance to the sheet should be necessary.

AVOIDING COMMON ERRORS IN CONDUCTING THE ADULT ATTACHMENT INTERVIEW

The Adult Attachment Interview requires a special kind of interviewing skill. As noted earlier, it is neither a fully clinical interview nor a questionnaire, and interviewers accustomed to clinical or questionnaire format may be in special need of extensive practice prior to conducting their first "real" interviews. The interviewer should be prepared to work with speakers who are irrelevant to the topic, those who speak at excessive length, and those who are unusually succinct. Here, we review these as well as other potential difficulties and biases.

Difficulties Contingent on use of a Clipped, "Questionnaire" Format

The informationally oriented or "questionnaire/survey" interview format leads interviewers to utilize a "clipped" manner of speaking in order to encourage participants to respond briefly (often by answering "yes" or "no"), and then move on to new topics. Administration of the Adult Attachment Interview, in contrast, requires a continuing awareness that the analysis of the interview will depend upon a study of the participant's natural phrasing, including his or her hesitations. For this reason, participants must not be interrupted as they attempt to formulate their thoughts. They must be given time to reflect, and the interviewer must not hasten to new questions. Interviewers who are genuinely interested in the story the participant is telling will find it natural to give the participant time to answer thoughtfully, and to expand gradually upon a given topic over the remainder of the interview.

Two particular speech tendencies are associated with the "clipped" or "questionnaire" approach to the interview. These are (i) the use of "cut-off" speech acts, and (ii) a failure to affirm continuing interest as the participant is speaking.

"Cut-off" speech acts. Responding to the Adult Attachment Interview is difficult for many participants, and many of the questions require considerable reflection. Therefore, the participant will often need time to pause, to stumble, to correct and to think out loud. Not only should the interviewer encourage continuation of the participant's speech through active affirmations of interest (below), but she or he should also listen to the audio-tapes to make certain they do not contain what we have termed "cut-off" speech acts or markers (George et al,

1985). Thus, some interviewers unconsciously note the end of a participant's first response to a question with remarks such as "mmHMM!", "great!", "uhHUH", "ohKAY". Interjections such as these can indicate to the participant, "Right. We've covered that area, now let's move on to the next", terminating the natural flow and development of the participant's ideas. Even when the content of the speech act appears to be positive ("great!"), the participant will understandably feel that what she thinks, remembers or feels is not really of interest to this interviewer:

Now I wonder if you could tell me, to which parent did you feel the closest, and why you felt closest to that parent?

Well, I would have thought, when I was a child I might have thought I was closer to my mother, because I saw more of her . . {2 sec pause}. Um/

/UhHUH, great! Why isn't there this feeling with your father?

Note that this participant has not only not been given a full conversational turn, but may have been considering contrasting the way she had seen her relationship to each parent during childhood with the way she would see it presently. By interrupting her the interviewer has not only indicated disinterest, but--insofar as the participant may have been beginning to engage in a change of mind regarding the parent she felt closest to--also may have taken away the opportunity for the interview analyst to later credit her with metacognitive monitoring.

Failure to affirm continuing interest as the participant is speaking. At times a respectful silence on the part of the interviewer is warranted, i.e., as the participant actively searches for thoughts or for words, or is clearly engaged in personal feeling or reminiscence. For many conversations, however, soft, semi-verbal acknowledgments of the partner's speech are a component of the listening attitude. These interjections ("oh", "not once?", "mmmm", "you went to her?"), may not even be conscious on the part of many interviewers, but their absence can make the continuation of speech difficult for the participant. On the audio-tape, these interjections on the part of the interviewer may be only barely audible.

Finally, although seen superficially as affirmations of interest and/or concern, "canned" phrases such as "thank you for sharing that with me" should be avoided. In general, such phrases affirm neither the interviewer's interest or the participant's experience.

Difficulties Contingent on an Overly Informal Style

As noted earlier, in clinical and cognitive terms the objective of the Adult Attachment Interview is to "surprise the unconscious". Few research participants will have had occasion to be addressed with the set questions and probes which form the basis of this interview, and the words, hesitations, exact phrasings, and speech errors which occur in response to the interview questions form the basis of our understanding of a given speaker's "overall state of mind with respect to attachment" (Main, 1995).

The participant's mental state is obscured to later analysis, however, when the interviewer is overly informal, violating guidelines by extensively joining in on or initiating conversation regarding matters other than the set interview topics. When marked, even a single such move on the part of the interviewer inevitably reduces the coder's ability to apply the potentially powerful linguistic analysis of the interviewee's first (and perhaps somewhat "surprised") response to the interview query. Because common conversation follows rules actively developed by both partners, the participant's own or individually guided speech errors and tendencies become obscured.

Note that in earlier editions of these guidelines (George et al, 1984, 1985) we advised that an interviewer may occasionally remark on their own experiences as an aid to assisting the participant to recognize the kind of memories or experiences which were being sought. This was not intended to encourage a sharing of experiences between interviewer and participant, and the remarks made in a few interviews in the initial Bay Area study were brief and to the point (as, "Well, it could be an experience that you wouldn't necessarily consider rejecting looking back on it now. For example, I can remember feeling rejected when my parents didn't get me a pony"). Remarks of this kind are in fact not necessary, and are no longer used. Needless to say, remarks that go beyond the ultimately fairly impersonal example given above should never have been utilized, since an interviewer must not begin a semi-intimate sharing of experiences with the participant.

Extreme violations of protocol. A few interviewers are informal to an extreme. Some attempt pursuing topics of their own, inserting queries regarding e.g., sibling relationships or

sibling rivalry⁷. Others attempt to expand upon topics mentioned by the participant as, "You said earlier your sister was depressed. Did you experience your sister's depression as traumatic in any way?", or attempt to combine these questions with questions which are standard to the interview, as "What effect do you think your sister's depression had on the development of your adult personality?", or "We've been discussing loss through death, but now I'd like to ask you whether you experienced your sister's moving to the East Coast as a loss. Also, was her depression some kind of loss for you?" A few interviewers have attempted to step outside the purposes of the interview in a semi-therapeutic manner, as, "I wonder if you've ever thought there might be some kind of connection between the way you say you worry about your child and those early losses you experienced", or, "I wonder if you ever experienced any anger with your mother for letting your father behave like that".

These extreme protocol violations are very serious. Any interviewer who adds queries or comments of this kind beyond a single initial practice interview should not be retained by the researcher.

Interviewing Speakers Presenting Special Difficulties

Interviewing participants speaking on irrelevant topics and/or at excessive length. The speaker's initiation of irrelevant diversions from the topic set by the interviewer are highly informative, as are tendencies to speak beyond one's conversational turn. Knowing that she or he must artfully permit the participant to fully reveal his or her speech tendencies, the skillful interviewer allows the speaker diversions from topic, as well as lengthy turns. In the following example, the interviewer--patiently not interrupting for several minutes, then once politely giving the speaker opportunity to return to the original query--acts correctly:

And 'difficult'. You used the word 'difficult' in describing your relationship with your mother in childhood. Any incidents or memories that would tell me why you chose that word to describe your relationship in childhood?

7. As noted earlier, topics of special interest to the researcher can of course be pursued separately, at the end of the formal interview (following question 18).

My mother was a very difficult person. And I've made an effort to be, um, very nice to my mother I don't mean nice nice like uh, well I've been nice nice to her. I the most important decision that I made was that she was not my mother and, um, I could see her as a separate person (Mm-hmm) and um, very much a character [laugh] (Mm-hmm) um, I was bullied by her when I was, up to when I was 12, but I'm not bullied by her anymore. (Mm-hmm mm-hmm) And, those are things that happened over years y'know like uh, after I got away from her and got married. . . {2 sec} (Mm-hmm) and um, I just I, the few times that we've seen her, um, each time it's gotten much easier and much easier, I told her I guess about 2 weeks ago 3 weeks ago, excuse me, she was angry that, I had her to dinner and she was angry that I served creamed onions, because she is sometimes allergic to onions, like, she gets these big rashes and she makes a big deal about it, and I said, its up to you to remember your allergies, it isn't up to me, and . . . {3 sec} and she's a very resentful person and these are the--little, little incidents that grow in her mind and they become more and more important and she calls up about them, and she screams about them, until she has, uh, well, I think she has some kind of, she's kind of borderline, a borderline disorder . . . (3 sec)

And would you say that she was difficult in that same way in your childhood, too?

Definitely, and what I said to her was, I said, Lookit, y'know nobody tells me what to serve to my family. It's a family matter, and you're over here as my guest, and I want you here, I really do, but you're not going to tell me, and I said, I think when you don't hear from me, if I don't call you, for whatever reasons, you think you find something that you can churn up I said that's just I'm busy I have, not only myself but other people to ca-take care of, all the time. And um, that's what's happening. (Mm-hmm) And when I when I s--when I get off the phone I always feel like that's terrific y'know it's one more thing I mean this person, whether she's my mother or what, all that stuff, there's always that conflict that goes on and I I feel very clear about it and I know that it'll happen again, the borderline stuff will come out again, her stuff will come out, but for me, I'll just it'll happen it'll come it'll get resolved faster, (Mm-hmm) and won't bother {typist

can't hear} as much. I think that I'm I'm it's I wonder whether my sister, she's just like my mother, I wondered if my sister would have treated me the same as my mother does, that is, if my sister was alive. I don't think so, I mean I think my sister really loved me, but she died, many many ye--many years ago, and she, with that she, I think I idealized her a little bit, I mean, if she lived, she might have been more like my mother is now, and treated me more like my mother does now, but maybe not. And I don't care for my mother the way I cared for my sister, because she didn't take care of me the way my sister took care of me, cause she was never there. So my mother wants me to love her now, but she hasn't earned that, she's not going to get it. (Mm-hmm) So I try with her, but I have to try, and I just can't feel about her the way she wants me to, (Mm-hmm) I mean the the conflicts that arise are that my husband really likes my mother, (Mm-hmm) So I get to witness the fact how he doesn't see what I see or know what I know, which is very difficult and painful. (Mm-hmm). But, it's, it's typical the way she behaves in front of him, she's different when he's around, but I'm different from her, I've never left my, never neglected my child, my son....{2 sec} under any circumstances, . . {2 sec} which is what had happened to me as a child. . . {2 sec} So I was lucky to be able to be different from my mother.

Mmmm. Well now, the second word you used to describe your childhood relationship with your mother was 'strong'. Can you think of a memory or an incident that would illustrate why you chose 'strong' to describe the relationship?

What the transcript coder will want to know is whether the speaker has violated the maxims of quantity and relevance, in the face of an interview which proceeds at a reasonable pace with a series of set questions. The analyst will be better assured that the speaker is in violation of cooperative discourse if the interviewer does seek one or two reasonable junctures to attempt to guide the speaker back to the immediate topic (as does the interviewer above), or to move forward to the next question (or to the interviewer's own conversational turn). If the interviewer fails to at least once politely remind the speaker of the original topic, the speaker will gradually become less markedly in violation of cooperative discourse, since the interviewer will have inadvertently "licensed" this change of direction. If, on the other hand, the interviewer

interrupts too frequently or insistently, the opportunity for correctly scoring and classifying the interview may be lost. As noted earlier, the interviewer quoted in the passage above has behaved appropriately, and should not have spoken more than she did. It should be noted that she waited to “remind” the participant of the original topic until there was a reasonable break in the participant’s speech (a 3-second pause), and she then waited past another long speech passage and a few brief pauses for a “concluding” sentence (“So, I was lucky to be able to be different from my mother”) before moving on to the next topic.

Interviewing speakers who introduce extraneous topics in a manner inviting interviewer participation. It is easy for speakers with tendencies to introduce irrelevant topics to lead new interviewers to violate protocol by briefly following the speaker into irrelevant areas. This may constitute a sympathetic attempt to alleviate the speaker’s evident anxiety and desire to avoid the topic. These well-intended errors may be comical:

*....and so, my mother was... a sweet, mild, uh, sort of a relationship, you know.
That very light fixture there, it, I think I've seen one like that before, somewhere...*

I have too. You used sweet, and mild, and...?

I wonder where it was, maybe when I was a little kid, they had them. And the color, it looks familiar too.

Yes, well, we have sweet and mild. Its one of the very best colors for light fixtures, I think. Anyway, they've been that color ever since I came here.

Errors of this kind are easy to make, but the interviewer should have found a way to acknowledge the participant without joining in on the new topic of conversation. This would have permitted the participant to continue with the irrelevant topic, without inadvertently “licensing” the change. A better interviewer response would have been as follows:

*....and so, my mother was... a sweet, mild, uh, sort of a relationship, you know.
That very light fixture there, it, I think I've seen one like that before, somewhere...*

Oh (spoken in a manner indicating mild acknowledgment). You used sweet, and mild, and...?

I wonder where it was, maybe when I was a little kid, they had them. And the color, it looks familiar too.

Yes, it could be . . . { said mildly again with brief pause to permit speaker to continue on irrelevant topic, but without joining in on it. If speaker does not continue on irrelevant topic, the interviewer continues with } . . . *Now we have the first two adjectives or words you've chosen, I think, sweet, and mild.*

This interviewer has succeeded in gently reminding the participant of the topic, while permitting the speaker to continue with his or her violation of relevance.

Interviewing speakers who are exceptionally succinct. The interviewer not infrequently is faced with a speaker who does not actually refuse the interview queries (e.g., by repeating "I don't remember"), but rather responds with answers which are exceptionally succinct. In this case, the interviewer still politely seeks to obtain the full information sought in the interview guidelines, and also to clarify points which may be obscure. At the same time, as always, the interviewer waits through long pauses for the speaker to complete his or her thought. The following interviewer is doing well with a speaker of this kind.

Did you ever feel rejected as a young child? Even if now you might not think you really were being rejected—well you might, but the point is I wonder whether as a child you ever felt rejected?

Yeah.

How old were you?

Ahm, ahm, twelve, twelve years old.

And, what happened that made you feel rejected?

Ahm, I wrote a couple of letters back, a couple of letters to uh, to my parents that I didn't want to stay there at the school, and uh...

You mean you wrote to them from the school?

From the school at Place 7 (yeah), and I can't even remember uh, I got like one letter back for, for, for Christmas vacation and that was, and I can't, I'm amazed, and I asked them, I said, "How come I have to stay here?". They never gave me a response.

So they didn't answer your letters?

Right.

How did you feel about that? What did you do?

Ahm, un--I just, I didn't feel wanted, or loved.

You, you felt unwanted and unloved.

Yeah.

Why do you think your parents did that--do you think they realized how it was making you feel?

. {5 sec} Probably my mom, yes.

Probably your mom did?

Yeah.

But your dad maybe didn't?

No.

Okay. Can you think of any other times when you felt rejected as a child?

. {17 sec} That's, that's about it.

That's the main one?

Yeah.

Other Common Errors and Difficulties

The errors discussed above consist in general biases frequently found in new interviewers, and problems presented by speakers of particular kinds. In addition, there are other relatively common errors and difficulties.

"Translating" the participant's responses and making reassuring interpretations. Clinicians and others accustomed to "mirroring" or "reflective listening" may tend occasionally to attempt to show understanding of a speaker's responses by repeating them back in altered form, or by completing sentences or ideas which seem to have been left incomplete. Responses of this kind, however well meant, are ruinous to the Adult Attachment Interview. *Occasional* repetition of a speaker's *exact* words can be acceptable as indicating a natural affirmation of interest.

So, that time I went to her . . . {4 sec pause}.

That time you went to her.

And, then it didn't work out the way I hoped.

However, any alteration of a speaker's word choice (as, alteration or reinterpretation of suggested adjectives), and any attempted completion of the speaker's unfinished responses will leave the interview analyst unable to determine the speaker's mental state at a given moment:

When he would scream at me like that I felt so, so . . {2 sec pause} well, I just felt like..

You felt so angry.

Uh, I, guess, yeah, sure, angry.

While the speaker is having some difficulty in finding the appropriate word, the interviewer has committed a serious error. The speaker might have eventually said that he found himself *confused*, *upset*, or *frightened*, or simply (equally informative to the eventual interview analysis) may have found himself unable to complete the sentence. This serious error may have even further repercussions, in that the rest of the interview may be somewhat altered. In further discussions of his feelings regarding the father over the course of this interview, the speaker now has the task of defending, or expanding upon, an "anger" towards the father which he may not have felt, and/or remembered, and/or intended to disclose.

Another error common to new interviewers consists in attempting to verbally support the participant's views of their experiences or of their parents. The interviewer may indicate empathy and interest non-verbally, or by the soft under-riding affirmations of continuing interest ('mmm'.... 'oh') discussed above. He or she must not, however, verbally endorse statements of attitude made by the speaker ("he sounds like an awful father/ they sound like lovely parents").

The above represent a set of injunctions to interviewers neither to change, nor especially endorse, the speaker's discourse or apparent attitudes. This does not mean that the interviewer must remain silent when not formally querying or probing, as the example taken from an interview with an overly succinct speaker (pp. 34-35) has shown.

Failure to respond appropriately to indeliberate re-organization of the interview format by participant. Sometimes a participant begins to answer a question which is to appear

later in the interview. The interviewer who is familiar with the protocol will be able to allow the research participant to complete their thought, while simultaneously indicating that the topic will arise again at a later point. When the speaker has completed her thought, then, the interviewer can simply add that she or he will want to be asking more about the topic later, and the participant should not be encouraged to continue to digress beyond this point. The question pertaining to this topic should then be raised when it appears in its prescribed order, with an acknowledgment that it has been discussed previously. This acknowledgment should however be phrased in an open-ended and non-leading manner. As an example, the interviewer might introduce the later question as, "You touched on this earlier, but..." or "You may have touched on this earlier, but...".

Note of course that a participant who has just explained that she felt rejected throughout her childhood should not be asked, "Did you ever feel rejected as a young child?" Rather, the interviewer begins, "I know we've already discussed this, but nevertheless could I ask you again, did you ever feel rejected as a young child?". The interviewer in this way acknowledges that this is a question which she or he "has" to ask because it is part of the interview protocol, and goes on to ask it as it appears within these guidelines (in this instance, for example, the interviewer might go on to say "Of course, looking back on it now, you may realize it was not really rejection, but what I'm trying to ask about here is whether you remember ever having felt rejected in childhood").

In certain rare cases--normally, those involving experiences of trauma--it may be necessary to allow the research participant to discuss a particular topic to some extent before telling them that it will be brought up again later. It is critical under these circumstances that the participant does not feel in any way diminished after having raised an topic which both creates feelings of vulnerability and is highly personal.

Failure to probe and/or to "follow-up" on participant responses. This is a separate issue from the need for continuing, under-riding acknowledgment that the participant "has the floor" and that what she is saying is continuing to be of interest (item 2, above). Often a research participant will make a statement which needs clarifying for the purposes of the interview, for example by responding briefly "I withdrew" to "What did you do when you felt rejected?".

Clearly, the interviewer needs to ask what this research participant actually did, since "I withdrew" might have any of several meanings.

In general, the skillful interviewer uses not only the set probes, but also his or her own spontaneous probes and follow-up questions as a technique in his or her effort to maintain a natural, semi-conversational. These probes and follow-up questions indicate that the participant's experiences and feelings are of genuine interest.

Tendency to probe negative more than positive events, or vice versa. On reviewing their protocols, interviewers are not infrequently surprised to note a bias towards probing either negative or positive adjectival descriptions for the parents, and/or experiences. The most obvious example is a tendency to avoid the follow-up probes to the abuse questions, and/or, somewhat more subtly, to avoid the natural inferences (and queries) which would follow when a subject (perhaps in some other section of the interview) describes an incident clearly bordering on abuse. Other interviewers tend to become most interested, and probe most deeply whenever negative events involving the parents are described or implied.

These biases are not confined to abuse incidents, since quite a few interviewers begin with a tendency towards providing more follow-up probes for negative than for positive adjectival descriptors for the parents. This is one of the several difficulties which interviewers and researchers should be alert to in reading through the prospective interviewer's early protocols.

ADULT ATTACHMENT INTERVIEW: THE PROTOCOL

ADULT ATTACHMENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction. *I'm going to be interviewing you about your childhood experiences, and how those experiences may have affected your adult personality. So, I'd like to ask you about your early relationship with your family, and what you think about the way it might have affected you. We'll focus mainly on your childhood, but later we'll get on to your adolescence and then to what's going on right now. This interview often takes about an hour, but it could be anywhere between 45 minutes and an hour and a half.*

1. Could you start by helping me get oriented to your early family situation, and where you lived and so on? If you could tell me where you were born, whether you moved around much, what your family did at various times for a living?

This question is used for orientation to the family constellation, and for warm-up purposes. The research participant must not be allowed to begin discussing the quality of relationships here, so the "atmosphere" set by the interviewer is that a brief list of "who, when" is being sought, and *no more than two or three minutes* at most should be used for this question. The atmosphere is one of briefly collecting demographics.

In the case of participants raised by several persons, and not necessarily raised by the biological or adoptive parents (frequent in high-risk samples), the opening question above may be *"Who would you say raised you?"*. The interviewer will use this to help determine who should be considered the primary attachment figure (s) on whom the interview will focus.

—Did you see much of your grandparents when you were little? If participant indicates that grandparents died during his or her own lifetime, ask the

participant's age at the time of each loss. If there were grandparents whom she or he never met, ask *whether this (these) grandparent(s) had died before she was born*. If yes, continue as follows: *Your mother's father died before you were born? How old was she at the time, do you know?* In a casual and spontaneous way, inviting only a very brief reply, the interviewer then asks, *Did she tell you much about this grandfather?*

—*Did you have brothers and sisters living in the house, or anybody besides your parents? Are they living nearby now or do they live elsewhere?*

2. *I'd like you to try to describe your relationship with your parents as a young child...if you could start from as far back as you can remember?*

- Encourage participants to try to begin by remembering very early. Many say they cannot remember early childhood, but you should shape the questions such that they focus at first around age five or earlier, and gently remind the research participant from time to time that if possible, you would like her to think back to this age period.
- Admittedly, this is leaping right into it, and the participant may stumble. If necessary, indicate in some way that experiencing some difficulty in initially attempting to respond to this question is natural, but indicate by some silence that you would nonetheless like the participant to attempt a general description.

3. *Now I'd like to ask you to choose five adjectives or words that reflect your relationship with your mother starting from as far back as you can remember in early childhood—as early as you can go, but say, age 5 to 12 is fine. I know this may take a bit of time, so go ahead and think for a minute...then I'd like to ask you why you chose them. I'll write each one down as you give them to me.*

- Not all participants will be able to think of five adjectives right away. Be sure to make the word *relationship* clear enough to be heard in this sentence. Some participants do use "relationship" adjectives to describe the parent, but some just describe the parent herself - e.g., "pretty"... "efficient manager"--as though they had only been asked to "pick adjectives to describe your mother". These individual differences are of interest only if the participant has heard the phrase, "that reflect your childhood *relationship*" with your mother. The word should be spoken clearly, but with only slight stress or emphasis.
- Some participants will not know what you mean by the term *adjectives*, which is why we phrase the question as "adjectives or words". If the participant has further questions, you can explain, "just words or phrases that would describe or tell me about your relationship with your (mother) during childhood".
- The probes provided below are intended to follow the entire set of adjectives, and *the interviewer must not begin to probe until the full set of adjectives has been given*. Be patient in waiting for the participant to arrive at five adjectives, and be encouraging. This task has proven very helpful both in starting an interview, and in later interview analysis. It helps some participants to continue to focus upon the relationship when otherwise they would not be able to come up with spontaneous comments.
- If for some reason a subject does not understand what a memory is, you might suggest they think of it like an image they have in their mind similar to a videotape of something which happened when they were young. Make certain that the subject really does not understand the question first, however. The great majority who may seem not to understand it are simply unable to provide a memory or incident.
- The participant's ability (or inability) to provide both an overview of the relationship and specific memories supporting that overview forms one of the most critical bases of interview analysis. For this reason it is important for the interviewer to press enough in the effort to obtain the five "overview" adjectives that if a full set is not provided, she or he is reasonably certain that they truly cannot be given.

- The interviewer's manner should indicate that waiting as long as a minute is not unusual, and that trying to come up with these words can be difficult. Often, participants indicate by their non-verbal behavior that they are actively thinking through or refining their choices. In this case an interested silence is warranted.
- Don't, however, repeatedly leave the participant in embarrassing silences for very long periods. Some research participants may tell you that this is a hard job, and you can readily acknowledge this. If the participant has extreme difficulty coming up with more than one or two words or adjectives, after a period of two to three minutes of supported attempts ("Mm... I know it can be hard...this is a pretty tough question... Just take a little more time"), then say something like "Well, that's fine. Thank you, we'll just go with the ones you've already given me." The interviewer's tone here should make it clear that the participant's response is perfectly acceptable and not uncommon.

—Okay, now let me go through some more questions about your description of your childhood relationship with your mother. You say your relationships with her was (you used the phrase)_____. Are there any memories or incidents that come to mind with respect to (word) _____ ?

The same questions will be asked *separately* for *each* adjective in series. Having gone through the probes which follow upon this question (below), the interviewer moves on to seek illustration for each of the succeeding adjectives in turn:

—You described your childhood relationship with your mother as (or, "your second adjective was", or "the second word you used was") _____. Can you think of a memory or an incident that would illustrate why you chose _____ to describe the relationship?

The interviewer continues, as naturally as possible, through each phrase or adjective chosen by the participant, until all five adjectives or phrases are covered. A specific supportive memory or expansion and illustration is requested for each of the adjectives, separately. In terms of time to answer, this is usually the longest question. Obviously, some adjectives chosen may

be almost identical, e.g., "loving ... caring". Nonetheless, if they have been given to you as separate descriptors, you must treat each separately, and ask for memories for each.

While participants sometimes readily provide a well-elaborated incident for a particular word they have chosen, at other times they may fall silent; or "illustrate" one adjective with another ("loving...um, because she was generous"); or describe what usually happened—i.e., offer a "scripted" memory--rather than describing specific incidents. There are a set series of responses available for these contingencies, and it is vital to memorize them.

- If the participant is silent, the interviewer waits an appropriate length of time. If the participant indicates nonverbally that she or he is actively thinking , remembering or simply attempting to come up with a particularly telling illustration, the interviewer maintains an interested silence. If the silence continues and seems to indicate that the participant is feeling stumped, the interviewer says something like, "*well , just take another minute and see if anything comes to mind*". If following another waiting period the participant still cannot respond to the question, treat this in a casual, matter of fact manner and say "*well, that's fine, let's take the next one, then*". Most participants do come up with a response eventually, however, and the nature of the response then determines which of the follow-up probes are utilized.
- If the participant re-defines an adjective with a second adjective as, "Loving...she was generous", the interviewer probes by repeating the *original* adjective (loving) rather than permitting the participant to lead them to use the second one (generous). In other words, the interviewer in this case will say, "*Well, can you think of a specific memory that would illustrate how your relationship was loving?*" The interviewer should be careful, however, not to be too explicit in their intention to lead the participant back to their original word usage. If the speaker continues to discuss "generous" after having been probed about *loving* once more, this violation of the discourse task is meaningful and must be allowed. As above, the nature of the participant's response determines which follow-up probes are utilized.

- If a specific and well-elaborated incident is given, the participant has responded satisfactorily to the task, and the interviewer should indicate that she or he understands that. However, the interviewer should briefly show continuing interest by asking whether the participant can think of a second incident.
- If one specific but poorly elaborated incident is given, the interviewer probes for a second. Again, the interviewer does this in a manner emphasizing his or her own interest.
- If as a first response the participant gives a "scripted" or "general" memory, as --
 "Loving. She always took us to the park and on picnics. She was really good on holidays" or "Loving. He taught me to ride a bike"--the interviewer says, *"Well, that's a good general description, but I'm wondering if there was a particular time that happened, that made you think about it as loving?"* If the participant does now offer a specific memory, briefly seek a second memory, as above. If another scripted memory is offered instead, or if the participant responds "I just think that was a loving thing to do", the interviewer should be accepting, and go on to the next adjective. Here as elsewhere the interviewer's behavior indicates that the participant's response is satisfactory.

4. *Now I'd like to ask you to choose five adjectives or words that reflect your childhood relationship with your father, again starting from as far back as you can remember in early childhood--as early as you can go, but again say, age 5 to 12 is fine. I know this may take a bit of time, so go ahead and think again for a minute...then I'd like to ask you why you chose them. I'll write each one down as you give them to me. (Interviewer repeats with probes as above).*

5. *Now I wonder if you could tell me, to which parent did you feel the closest, and why? Why isn't there this feeling with the other parent?*

- By the time you are through with the above set of questions, the answer to this one may be obvious, and you may want to remark on that ("*You've already discussed this a bit, but I'd like to ask about it briefly anyway...*"). Furthermore, while the answer to this question may indeed be obvious for many participants, some—particularly those who describe both parents as loving—may be able to use it to reflect further on the difference in these two relationships.

6. *When you were upset as a child, what would you do?*

- This is a critical question in the interview, and variations in the interpretation of this question are important. Consequently, the participant is first encouraged to think up her own interpretations of "upset", with the interviewer pausing quietly to indicate that the question is completed, and that an answer is requested.
- Once the participant has completed her own interpretation of the question, giving a first answer, begin on the following probes. Be sure to get expansions of every answer. If the participant states, for example, "I withdrew", probe to understand what this research participant means by "withdrew". For example, you might say, "And what would you do when you withdrew?"
- The interviewer now goes on to ask the specific follow-up questions below. These questions may appear similar, but they vary in critical ways, so the interviewer *must* make sure that the participant thinks through each question separately. This is done by placing vocal stress on the changing contexts (as we have indicated by underlining).

-----*When you were upset emotionally when you were little, what would you do?* (Wait for participant's reply). *Can you think of a specific time that happened?*

-----*Can you remember what would happen when you were hurt, physically? (Wait for participant's reply). Again, do any specific incidents (or, do any other incidents) come to mind?*

-----*Were you ever ill when you were little? (Wait for participant's reply). Do you remember what would happen?*

- When the participant describes going to a parent, see first what details they can give you spontaneously. Try to get a sense of how the parent or parents responded, and then when and if it seems appropriate you can briefly ask one or two clarifying questions.
- Be sure to get expansions of every answer. Again, if the participant says "I withdrew", for example, probe to see what the participant means by this, i.e., what exactly she or he did, or how exactly they felt, and if they can elaborate on the topic.
- If the participant has not spontaneously mentioned being held by the parent in response to any of the above questions, the interviewer can ask casually at the conclusion to the series, *"I was just wondering, do you remember being held by either of your parents at any of these times—I mean, when you were upset, or hurt, or ill?"*
- In earlier editions of these guidelines, we suggested that if the participant answers primarily in terms of responses by one of the parents, the interviewer should go through the above queries again with respect to the remaining parent. This can take a long time and distract from the recommended pacing of the interview. Consequently, it is no longer required.

7. *What is the first time you remember being separated from your parents?*

-- *How did you respond? Do you remember how your parents responded?*

--- *Are there any other separations that stand out in your mind?*

- Here research participants often describe first going off to nursery school, or to primary school, or going camping.
- In this context, participants sometimes spontaneously compare their own responses to those of other children. This provides important information regarding the participant's own overall attitude towards attachment, so be careful not to cut any such descriptions or comparisons short.

8. *Did you ever feel rejected as a young child? Of course, looking back on it now, you may realize it wasn't really rejection, but what I'm trying to ask about here is whether you remember ever having felt rejected in childhood.*

-----How old were you when you first felt this way, and what did you do?

----Why do you think your parent did those things—do you think he/she realized he/she was rejecting you?

- Interviewer may want to add a probe by reframing the question here, especially if no examples are forthcoming. The probe we suggest here is, *"Did you ever feel pushed away or ignored?"*
- Many participants tend to avoid this in terms of a positive answer.

8a. *Were you ever frightened or worried as a child?*

Let the research participant respond "freely" to this question, defining the meaning for themselves. They may ask you what the question means, and if so, simply respond by saying "It's just a more general question". Do not probe heavily here. If the research participant has had traumatic experiences which they elect not to describe, or which they have difficulty remembering or thinking about, you should not insist upon hearing about them. They will have a second, brief opportunity to discuss such topics later.

9. *Were your parents ever threatening with you in any way- -maybe for discipline, or even jokingly?*

-----Some people have told us for example that their parents would threaten to leave them or send them away from home.

-----(Note to researchers). In particular communities, some specific kind of punishment not generally considered fully abusive is common, such as “the silent treatment”, or “shaming”, etc. One question regarding this one selected specific form of punishment can be inserted here, as for example, *“Some people have told us that their parents would use the silent treatment—did this ever happen with your parents?”*. The question should then be treated exactly as threatening to send away from home, i.e., the participant is free to answer and expand on the topic if she or he wishes, but there are no specific probes. The researcher should not ask about more than one such specific (community) form of punishment, since queries regarding more than one common type will lead the topic away from its more general intent (below).

Some people have memories of threats or of some kind of behavior that was abusive.

-----Did anything like this ever happen to you, or in your family?

-----How old were you at the time? Did it happen frequently?

-----Do you feel this experience affects you now as an adult?

-----Does it influence your approach to your own child?

-----Did you have any such experiences involving people outside your family?

If the participant indicates that something like this did happen outside the family, take the participant through the same probes (*age? frequency? affects you now as an adult? Influences your approach to your own child?*). Be careful

with this question, however, as it is clinically sensitive, and by now you may have been asking the participant difficult questions for an extended period of time.

Many participants simply answer "no" to these questions. Some, however, describe abuse and may some suffer distress in the memory. When the participant is willing to discuss experiences of this kind, the interviewer must be ready to maintain a respectful silence, or to offer active sympathy, or to do whatever may be required to recognize and insofar as possible to help alleviate the distress arising with such memories.

If the interviewer suspects that abuse or other traumatic experiences occurred, it is important to attempt to ascertain the specific details of these events insofar as possible. In the coding and classification system which accompanies this interview, *distressing experiences cannot be scored for Unresolved/disorganized responses unless the researcher is able to establish that abuse (as opposed to just heavy spanking, or light hitting with a spoon that was not frightening) occurred.*

Where the nature of a potentially physically abusive (belting, whipping, or hitting) experience is ambiguous, then, the interviewer should try to establish the nature of the experience in a light, matter-of-fact manner, without excessive prodding. If, for example, the participant says "I got the belt" and stops, the interviewer asks, "And what did getting the belt mean?". After encouraging as much spontaneous expansion as possible, the interviewer may still need to ask, again in a matter-of-fact tone, how the participant responded or felt at the time. "Getting the belt" *in itself* will not qualify as abuse within the adult attachment scoring and classification systems, since in some households and communities this is a common, systematically but not harshly imposed experience. Being belted heavily enough to overwhelmingly frighten the child for her physical welfare at the time, being belted heavily enough to cause lingering pain, and/or being belted heavily enough to leave welts or bruises will qualify.

In the case of sexual abuse as opposed to battering, the interviewer will seldom need to press for details, and should be very careful to follow the participant's lead. Whereas on most occasions in which a participant describes themselves as sexually abused the interviewer and transcript judge will have little need to probe further, occasionally a remark is ambiguous enough

to require at least mild elaboration. If, for example, the participant states 'and I just thought he could be pretty sexually abusive', the interviewer will ideally follow-up with a query such as, 'well, could you tell me a little about what was happening to make you see him as sexually abusive?'. Should the participant reply that the parent repeatedly told off-color jokes in her company, or made untoward remarks about her attractiveness, the parent's behavior, though insensitive, will not qualify as sexually abusive within the accompanying coding system. Before seeking elaboration of any kind, however, the interviewer should endeavor to determine whether the participant seems comfortable in discussing the incident or incidents.

All querying regarding abuse incidents must be conducted in a matter-of-fact, professional manner. The interviewer must use good judgment in deciding whether to bring querying to a close if the participant is becoming uncomfortable. At the same time, the interviewer *must not avoid the topic or give the participant the impression that discussion of such experiences is unusual*. Interviewers sometimes involuntarily close the topic of abuse experiences and their effects, in part as a well-intentioned and protective response towards participants who in point of fact would have found the discussion welcome.

Participants who seem to be either thinking about or revealing abuse experiences for the first time-- "No, nothing....no... well, I, I haven't thought, remembered this for, oh, years, but ...maybe they used to... tie me...."-- must be handled with special care, and should not be probed unless they clearly and actively seem to want to discuss the topic. If you sense that the participant has told you things they have not previously discussed or remembered, special care must be taken at the end of the interview to ensure that the participant does not still suffer distress, and feels able to contact the interviewer or project director should feelings of distress arise in the future.

In such cases the participant's welfare must be placed above that of the researcher. While matter-of-fact, professional and tactful handling of abuse-related questions usually makes it possible to obtain sufficient information for scoring, the interviewer must be alert to indications of marked distress, and ready to tactfully abandon this line of questioning where necessary. Where the complete sequence of probes must be abandoned, the interviewer should move

gracefully and smoothly to the next question, as though the participant had in fact answered fully.

10. *In general, how do you think your overall experiences with your parents have affected your adult personality?*

- The interviewer should pause to indicate she or he expects the participant to be thoughtful regarding this question, and is aware that answering may require some time.

Are there any aspects to your early experiences that you feel were a set-back in your development?

- In some cases, the participant will already have discussed this question. Indicate, as usual, that you would just like some verbal response again anyway, "for the record".
- It is quite important to know whether or not a participant sees their experiences as having had a negative effect on them, so the interviewer will follow-up with one of the two probes provided directly below. The interviewer must stay alert to the participant's exact response to the question, since the phrasing of the probe differs according to the participant's original response.

- If the participant has named one or two setbacks, the follow-up probe used is:

—Are there any other aspects of your early experiences, that you think might have held your development back, or had a negative effect on the way you turned out?

- If the participant has understood the question, but has not considered anything about early experiences a setback, the follow-up probe used is:

—Is there anything about your early experiences that you think might have held your development back, or had a negative effect on the way you turned out?

Although the word *anything* receives some vocal stress, the interviewer must be careful not to seem to be expressing impatience with the participant's previous answer. The stress simply implies that the participant is being given another chance to think of something else she or he might have forgotten a moment ago.

- RE: PARTICIPANTS WHO DON'T SEEM TO UNDERSTAND THE TERM, SET-BACK. A few participants aren't familiar with the term, *set-back*. If after a considerable wait for the participant to reflect, the participant seems simply puzzled by the question, the interviewer says, *"Well, not everybody uses terms like set-back for what I mean here. I mean, was there anything about your early experiences, or any parts of your early experiences, that you think might have held your development back, or had a negative effect on the way you turned out?"*

In this case, this becomes the main question, and the probe becomes

–Is there anything else about your early experiences that you think might have held your development back, or had a negative effect on the way you turned out?

11. *Why do you think your parents behaved as they did during your childhood?*

- This question is relevant even if the participant feels childhood experiences were entirely positive. For participants reporting negative experiences, this question is particularly important.

12. *Were there any other adults with whom you were close, like parents, as a child?*

— Or any other adults who were especially important to you, even though not parental?

- Give the participant time to reflect on this question. This is the point at which some participants will mention housekeepers, au pairs, or nannies, and some will mention other family members, teachers, or neighbors.
- Be sure to find out ages at which these persons were close with the participant, whether they had lived with the family, and whether they had had any caregiving responsibilities. In general, attempt to determine the significance and nature of the relationship.

13. Did you experience the loss of a parent or other close loved one while you were a young child—for example, a sibling, or a close family member?
(A few participants understand the term “loss” to cover brief or long-term separations from living persons, as, “I lost my mom when she moved South to stay with her mother”. If necessary, clarify that you are referring to death only, i.e. specifically to loved ones who had died).

-----Could you tell me about the circumstances, and how old you were at the time?

-----How did you respond at the time?

—Was this death sudden or was it expected?

-----Can you recall your feelings at that time?

-----Have your feelings regarding this death changed much over time?

—If not volunteered earlier. Did you attend the funeral, and what was this like for you?

—If loss of a parent or sibling. What would you say was the effect on your (other parent) and on your household, and how did this change over the years?

—Would you say this loss has had an effect on your adult personality?

—Where relevant. *How does it affect your approach to your own child?*

13a. Did you lose any other important persons during your childhood?

(Same queries--again, this refers to people who have died rather than separation experiences).

13b. Have you lost other close persons, in adult years? (Same queries).

- Be sure that the response to these questions covers loss of any siblings, whether older or younger, loss of grandparents, and loss of any person who seemed a "substitute parent" or who lived with the family for a time. Some individuals will have been deeply affected by losses which occurred in the adult years. Give the participant time to discuss this, and make sure to cover the same issues and follow the same probes.
- Probe any loss which seems important to the participant, including loss of friends, distant relatives, and neighbors or neighbor's children. Rarely, the research participant will seem distressed by the death of someone who they did not personally know (often, a person in the family, but sometimes someone as removed as the friend of a friend). If a participant brings up the suicide of a friend of a friend and seems distressed by it, the loss should be fully probed. The interviewer should be aware, then, that speakers may be assigned to the unresolved/disorganized adult attachment classification as readily for lapses in monitoring occurring during the discussion of the death of a neighbor's child experienced during the adult years as for loss of a parent in childhood.
- Interviewing research participants regarding loss obviously requires good clinical judgment. At maximum, only four to five losses are usually fully probed. In the case of older research participants or those with traumatic histories, there may be many losses, and the interviewer will have to decide on the spot which losses to probe. No hard and fast rules can be laid out for determining which losses to skip, and the interviewer must to the best of his or her ability determine which losses--if there are many--are in fact of personal significance to the participant. Roughly, in the case of a participant who has lost both parents, spouse, and many other friends and relatives by the time of the

interview, the interviewer might elect to probe the loss of the parents, the spouse, and "any other loss which you feel may have been especially important to you". If, however, these queries seem to be becoming wearying or distressing for the participant, the interviewer should acknowledge the excessive length of the querying, and offer to cut it short.

14. Other than any difficult experiences you've already described, have you had any other experiences which you would regard as potentially traumatic?

Let the participant free-associate to this question, then clarify if necessary with a phrase such as, *I mean, any experience which was overwhelmingly and immediately terrifying.*

- This question is a recent addition to the interview. It permits participants to bring up experiences which may otherwise be missed, such as scenes of violence which they have observed, war experiences, violent separation, or rape.
- Some researchers may elect not to use this question, since it is new to the 1996 protocol. If you do elect to use it, it must of course be used with all subjects in a given study.
- The advantage of adding this question is that it may reveal lapses in reasoning or discourse specific to traumatic experiences other than loss or abuse.
- Be very careful, however, not to permit this question to open up the interview to all stressful, sad, lonely or upsetting experiences which may have occurred in the subject's lifetime, or the purpose of the interview and of the question may be diverted. It will help if your tone indicates that these are rare experiences.
- Follow up on such experiences with probes *only* where the participant seems at relative ease in discussing the event, and/or seems clearly to have discussed and thought about it before.
- Answers to this question will be varied. Consequently, exact follow-up probes cannot be given in advance, although the probes succeeding the abuse and loss questions may serve as a

partial guide. In general, the same cautions should be taken with respect to this question as with respect to queries regarding frightening or worrisome incidents in childhood, and experiences of physical or sexual abuse. Many researchers may elect to treat this question lightly, since the interview is coming to a close and it is not desirable to leave the participant reviewing too many difficult experiences just prior to leavetaking.

15. Now I'd like to ask you a few more questions about your relationship with your parents. Were there many changes in your relationship with your parents (or remaining parent) after childhood? We'll get to the present in a moment, but right now I mean changes occurring roughly between your childhood and your adulthood?

- Here we are in part trying to find out, *indirectly* (1) whether there has been a period of rebellion from the parents, and (2) also indirectly, whether the participant may have rethought early unfortunate relationships and "forgiven" the parents. Do not ask anything about forgiveness directly, however--this will need to come up spontaneously.
- This question also gives the participant the chance to describe any changes in the parents' behavior, favorable or unfavorable, which occurred at that time.

16. Now I'd like to ask you, what is your relationship with your parents (or remaining parent) like for you now as an adult? Here I am asking about your current relationship.

—Do you have much contact with your parents at present?

—What would you say the relationship with your parents is like currently?

—Could you tell me about any (or any other) sources of dissatisfaction in your current relationship with your parents? any special (or any other) sources of special satisfaction?

- This has become a critical question within the Adult Attachment Interview, since a few participants who had taken a positive stance towards their parents earlier suddenly take a negative stance when asked to describe current relationships. As always, the interviewer should express a genuine interest in the participant's response to this question, with sufficient pause to indicate that a reflective response is welcome.

17. I'd like to move now to a different sort of question—it's not about your relationship with your parents, instead it's about an aspect of your current relationship with (specific child of special interest to the researcher, or all the participant's children considered together). How do you respond now, in terms of feelings, when you separate from your child/children? (For adolescents or individuals without children, see below).

- Ask this question exactly as it is, without elaboration, and be sure to give the participant enough time to respond. Participants may respond in terms of leaving child at school, leaving child for vacations, etc., and this is encouraged. What we want here are the *participant's feelings* about the separation. This question has been very helpful in interview analysis, for two reasons. In some cases it highlights a kind of role-reversal between parents and child, i.e., the participant may in fact respond as though it were the child who was leaving the parent alone, as though the parent was the child. In other cases, the research participant may speak of a fear of loss of the child, or a fear of death in general. When you are certain you have given enough time (or repeated or clarified the question enough) for the participant's naturally-occurring response, then (and only then) add the following probe:

—Do you ever feel worried about (child)?

For individuals without children, you will pose this question as a hypothetical one, and continue through the remaining questions in the same manner. For example, you can say, *"Now I'd*

like you to imagine that you have a one-year-old child, and I wonder how you think you might respond, in terms of feelings, if you had to separate from this child?"... "Do you think you would ever feel worried about this child?"

18. If you had three wishes for your child twenty years from now, what would they be? I'm thinking partly of the kind of future you would like to see for your child. I'll give you a minute or two to think about this one.

- This question is primarily intended to help the participant begin to look to the future, and to lift any negative mood which previous questions may have imposed.

For individuals without children, you again pose this question in hypothetical terms. For example, you can say, *"Now I'd like you to continue to imagine that you have a one-year-old child for just another minute. This time, I'd like to ask, if you had three wishes for your child twenty years from now, what would they be? I'm thinking partly of the kind of future you would like to see for your imagined child. I'll give you a minute or two to think about this one".*

19. Is there any particular thing which you feel you learned above all from your own childhood experiences? I'm thinking here of something you feel you might have gained from the kind of childhood you had.

- Give the participant plenty of time to respond to this question. Like the previous and succeeding questions, it is intended to help integrate whatever untoward events or feelings he or she has experienced or remembered within this interview, and to bring the interview down to a light close.

20. We've been focusing a lot on the past in this interview, but I'd like to end up looking quite a ways into the future. We've just talked about what

you think you may have learned from your own childhood experiences. I'd like to end by asking you what would you hope your child (or, your imagined child) might have learned from his/her experiences of being parented by you?

The interviewer now begins helping the participant to turn his or her attention to other topics and tasks. Participants are given a contact number for the interviewer and/or project director, and encouraged to feel free to call if they have any questions.

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1. Oriented re family, where you lived, moved much, what family did for living?---Grandparents seen much, or die when parents young--know much about grandparent who died before your birth?--- Other persons in household? - Sibs nearby? (Keep short/demographic, no more than 2 or 3 minutes).
2. I'd like you to try to describe your relationship with your parents as a young child...if you could start as far back as you remember?
3. Five adjectives describing your childhood relationship with mother, as early as you can remember but about 5-12 fine (write down adjectives). Probe each in sequence given, asking for memories, incidents before moving on to next adjective. When a well-elaborated specific incident is given, very briefly enquire regarding a second. When poorly elaborated specific incident is given, ask for a second. When another adjective is used for a first adjective, repeat query once with reference to original adjective. When general or scripted memories are given, probe once a more specific memory.
4. Five adjectives father. As above.
5. To which parent closest, and why? Why not same feeling with other parent?
6. When upset as a child, what do? Pause. (a) Upset emotionally? --incidents? (b) Physically hurt--incidents? (c) When ill--what would happen?
7. First separation? How did you respond? How did parents respond? Other separations that stand out?
8. Felt rejected as a child? How old? What did you do? Why parent did these things? Realize he/she was rejecting you?
8a. Were you ever frightened or worried as a child?
9. Parents ever threatening--for discipline, jokingly? (Elective per researcher: Select one specific form of punishment used in researcher's community--ever happened to you?). Some people have memories of some kind of abuse in family--happen to you or in your family? ---what exactly happened, describe--how old, how severe, how frequent -this experience affect you as adult? --affect approach to child?
10. In general, how do you think your overall experiences have affected your adult personality? Any aspects of early experiences you consider a set-back to your development?
11. Why do you think your parents behaved as they did, during childhood?
12. Other adults close like parents as a child? Or other adults especially important though not parental? (Your age at time--did they live in household?--had caregiving responsibilities?--why important?).
13. Loss of parent, other close loved one (sibs) as child? ---circumstances? ---age? ---how respond at time? ---sudden expected? ---recall how felt at time? ---feelings changed over time? ---attend funeral? ---what was it like? (If parent or sib lost, effect on remaining parent and on household?)---effect of this loss on adult personality? ---on approach to own child?
13a. Other important losses in childhood. Queries as above.
13b. Important losses in adulthood. Queries as above.
14. Ever had any other experiences you regard as potentially traumatic?--after participant interprets for himself or herself, make clear you mean rare overwhelmingly and immediately terrifying events--probe using best judgment Elective per researcher.
15. Were there many changes in your relationship with parents between childhood and adulthood?
16. What is relationship with parents like for you currently as an adult? much contact with parents at present? what is relationship like currently? current sources of dissatisfaction? of satisfaction?
17. Feel now when separate from child? (or imaginary one year old child). After sufficient time has passed for subject to describe response add, Do you ever feel worried about (imagined) child?
18. If 3 wishes for child 20 years from now, what? Thinking of kind of future you'd like to see for child. Minute or time to think.
19. Any one thing learned from own childhood experience? I'm thinking here of something you feel you might have gained from the kind of childhood you had.
20. What would you hope child will have learned from his/her experience of being parented by you?

TABLE 1: Adult attachment classifications as related to corresponding patterns of infant Strange Situation behavior¹

1. Descriptions of the Adult Attachment Classification System are taken from Main et al, 1985 and from Main & Goldwyn, 1985-1996. Descriptions of infant ABC categories are taken from Ainsworth et al, 1978, and the description of the infant D category is taken from Main & Solomon, 1990.

ADULT STATE OF MIND WITH RESPECT TO ATTACHMENT	INFANT STRANGE SITUATION BEHAVIOR
<u>Secure/Autonomous (F)</u> Coherent, collaborative discourse throughout the interview. Valuing of attachment, but seems objective regarding any particular event or relationship. Description and evaluation of attachment-related experiences is consistent, whether experiences themselves are favorable or unfavorable. Discourse does not notably violate any of Grice's maxims.	<u>Secure (B)</u> Explores room and toys with interest in pre-separation episodes. Shows signs of missing parent on separation, often crying by the second separation. Obvious preference for parent over stranger. Greets parent actively, usually initiating physical contact. Usually some contact-maintaining by second reunion, but then settles and returns to play.
<u>Dismissing (Ds)</u> Not coherent. Dismissing of attachment-related experiences and relationships. Normalizing ('<i>excellent, very normal mother</i>'), with generalized representations of history unsupported or actively contradicted by autobiographical episodes recounted. Thus, violating of Grice's maxim of quality. Transcripts also tend to be excessively brief, violating the maxim of quantity.	<u>Avoidant (A)</u> Fails to cry on separation from parent, often continues to play even when left entirely alone. Actively avoids and ignores parent on reunion, i.e., by moving away, turning away, or leaning out of arms when picked up. Little or no proximity or contact seeking, no distress, and no display of anger. Response to parent appears unemotional. Focuses on toys or environment throughout procedure.
<u>Preoccupied (E)</u> Not coherent. Preoccupied with or by past attachment relationships/ experiences, speaker appears angry, passive or fearful. Sentences often long, grammatically entangled or filled with vague usages ('<i>dadadada</i>', '<i>and that</i>'). Thus, violating of Grice's maxims of manner and relevance. Transcripts excessively long, violating quantity.	<u>Resistant (C)</u> May be wary or distressed even prior to separation, with little exploration. Preoccupied with parent throughout procedure, may seem angry or passive during reunion. Following reunion, fails to settle and take comfort in parent, usually continuing to focus on parent and cry. Fails to return to exploration.
<u>Unresolved/disorganized (U/d)</u> During discussions of loss or abuse, individual shows striking lapse in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse. For example, individual may briefly indicate a dead person is believed still alive in the physical sense, may briefly indicate a belief that a person was killed by a childhood thought, may lapse into prolonged silence, or may lapse into eulogistic speech. Individual may otherwise fit to Ds, E or F categories.	<u>Disorganized/disoriented (D)</u> The infant displays disorganized and/or disoriented behaviors in the parent's presence, suggesting a lapse of behavioral strategy. For example, the infant may freeze with a trancelike expression, hands in air; may rise at parent's entrance, then fall prone and huddled on the floor; or may cling while crying hard and leaning away with gaze averted. Infant may otherwise fit to A, B or C categories.